Understanding Adora

by Eleanor M. Ingram

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ONE of the most successful stories that this magazine has ever published, one of the most humanly beautiful and heart-warming, was Eleanor Ingram's novelette, "A Man's Hearth." Here is another story by this truly talented author, and one that in its very different way can well hold its own with the earlier work. It is a love-story, pure and simple—but what a love-story!

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE LADY WHO DARED.

THE limousine of Miss Van Huyden was locked to the curb in a blockade of vehicles; vehicles aristocratic, vehicles vulgar, vehicles merely of business and therefore negligible necessities. From side to side they filled the avenue. Yet, within the compass of a spectator's immediate vision, there was perhaps none so satisfying in its correctness, so subduedly irreproachable as the car whose door displayed the tiny monogram, "A. V. H." The limousine expressed the taste of its owner; a taste that was beyond question.

She had crossed the sidewalk, a moment since, from the costly quaintness of a sophisticated antique shop, where she had gone to choose a gift for a December bride-to-be. Perhaps it was the romance of that shopping which had brought an unusual shade of excitement to her expression. Certainly she had hurried her step more than usual, as she forded the double stream of pedestrians.

The pedestrians did not hasten to pass her. Women seized in comprehensive glances the *bouffante* swirl of her violet broadcloth skirt, the swing of the ridiculous little coat, which exposed frost-white ruffles almost burying her chin, and the quality of the silver-fox scarf that wrapped her straight, young shoulders. Men approved, rather, the harmony of violet and white with the lady's lustrous hair, of which each smooth thread seemed to shine with vitality; the darkness of her eyes, which caught a sympathetic violet, and the rosy fairness of her skin.

Miss Van Huyden did not look at them at all. The short skirt, billowing in the breeze well above her slender, violet-kid boots, lent her an air of frivolity quite out of keeping with her composed dignity of carriage. She had an air of delicate aloofness, as she listened to the shop-

keeper who attended her to the car door; a door held open by a frigid footman with a furred robe over his arm.

"If desired, the Carrara bird-bath can be exchanged at any time," the dealer was urging deferentially. "The silver lamp also is charming; after Cellini, Miss Van Huyden!"

"Thank you," declined his patroness. "I rarely change my mind."

The dealer bowed. The footman spread the robe, closed the door, and remounted the box like an automaton in good order.

There the triumphal progress of the lady stopped. To the gray-mustached officer on the corner vehicles were vehicles, and he had that moment lifted his hand to command a halt, a truce in favor of the cross-street. The Van Huyden machine was pocketed by a Fifth Avenue stage, a florist's delivery wagon, and two ostentatious touring cars.

There had been a heavy fall of snow the day previously; and in default of better places of deposit, the masses of amalgamated snow and street filth were being stacked in huge heaps down the center of each thoroughfare. A gang of laborers was at this work, opposite the antique shop, shoveling more or less vigorously under the eye of a pipe-smoking foreman. Close beside Miss Van Huyden's car, two of the men were employed in removing snow from the gutter.

One of them might have touched the window behind which the lady leaned and observed him, had such an impertinent desire occurred to him.

He was a young man in a tweed suit, and he was shoveling with singular energy and abandon in view of the fact that he stood beyond the foreman's present range of vision. He was bare-headed—Miss Van Huyden distinguished a tweed cap thrusting its brim out of his coat-pocket—and his fair hair glittered in the sunlight.

He did not look cold, nor hungry, nor even very shabby. There was nothing weak or pathetic about the lusty swings with which he sent masses of wet snow flying to the center of the street; nor did he appear in least conscious of the humble nature of his employment, or embarrassed by his obvious difference from his fellow-workers. His strong, pleasantly irregular young face wore an expression at once earnest and light-hearted. Once his lips puckered to a whistle.

Presently he turned about, and encountered the eyes of Miss Van Huyden across the barrier of the windowpane; eyes oddly close in tint to the knot of heliotrope fastened among her laces.

The girl deliberately leaned forward and opened the door of her car, not taking her gaze from that of the man.

"Will you come in, please?" she invited in her smooth, level tones.

His eyes narrowed; his brows lifted in an astonished, whimsical doubt.

"Have I, perhaps, the honor—" he began.

"Of knowing me?" she checked his hesitation. "No."

"And yet—"

"I ask you to enter; yes."

He studied her face again, then swung about to put his shovel into the hand of the staring workman beside him.

"Excuse me to our charming foreman," he bade the man. "I have an important engagement—as you see."

He bowed to his hostess, took the seat opposite her, and taking the handle from her, gently closed the door. Already the traffic officer's whistle had sounded. The stream of vehicles quivered, stirred, and flowed on; carrying with it the Van Huyden car with a new and unconventional passenger.

The man and the girl considered one another with curiosity, even with profound interest, but with a steadying freedom from embarrassment. Miss Van Huyden had laid aside, as one lays aside a garment designed only for wear upon the streets, that cold and distant bearing to which she had been carefully trained. Her lips were willing to smile, and a brighter color than before stained her smooth cheek.

"I wonder," she first spoke, "I wonder why you imagine that I did this?"

"I have not imagined very plausibly yet," he returned. "But I sincerely hope it isn't charity."

Her lip arched in a curve of appreciation.

"No. Not at all! I admit that would have been a very creditable motive, but it was not mine."

"Then perhaps I have the pleasure of meeting the mysterious lady of fiction who appeals to the stalwart stranger to aid her for a night, or a day, or to an elopement, or marriage in secret?"

"I am sorry to be such a stupidly practical person, but I should certainly appeal in any such case to my father and mother, or to one of my altogether amiable uncles. I know how fatal an admission that is to romance."

"But is this a romantic episode?" he doubted.

She clasped her small, white-gloved hands upon her knee. The man saw then, as she looked straightly at him, how hot and strong was the vital spirit that burned within her, and how little she herself was as yet aware of this. Her calmness, her air of aloofness and dignity, were but the engraved and polished exterior of the lamp above which danced the flame. He guessed her to be twenty-four or five, and that hers was the poise that comes from an assured position, much travel, and the meeting of many people.

"Yes," she answered him. "It is romantic. At least, I call it so. Is the romance of the world limited to the three themes of love, friendship, and adventure, with their variations? What of the romance of theosophy, of science? And what of the romance of those impulses that suddenly grip men and women and push them toward some deed as strongly as unseen hands laid upon their shoulders? Has not every one felt such promptings, or heard of them, and wondered vaguely at such alien visitors? What might not follow if we did not shrink away, if we had the courage to obey those impulses—at least the ones to good—and abide by the result? Surely that question has both romance and interest!"

"Did you expect to discuss psychology with a snow-shoveler?" he wondered.

"Perhaps. Let me know whether you understand me enough for an experiment, or whether I had better set you down at the next corner."

"The next corner?" he repeated. "Is that a threat? We are already a long way from my—snow-shovel."

"It is a promise, so answer carefully. But the next corner was a figure of speech; of course you shall be taken back to your place of shoveling. If you wish?"

"I do not wish! As for my understanding—"

There was a pause, during which he gazed out of the window, between the curtains of dove-colored silk, at the crowds flowing past in ceaseless monotony. In her turn, Anne Van Huyden observed that he was thin in a young, virile way that hinted of hard word rather than privation.

Yet he did not look like a man accustomed to physical labor. The shovel had left telltale marks upon his hands, and his shoes were those of a gentleman, not the thick boots of a laborer. They were drenched with snow-water, she noted incidentally. She was not experienced enough in discomfort to realize how cold such footwear must be, now that the man was no longer warmed by vigorous exercise.

"When I was ten years old," he remarked meditatively, "I sold a new riding horse that my father had brought home the day before, to a gipsy horse-trader. I believe the price was about fifteen dollars. I knew the animal's value better than that, but the horse seemed to me so full of menace to my father, so created for misfortune, that I rose at dawn, ran two miles to a gipsy settlement, and brought back the fellow, to whom I disposed of it. And yet I loved horses, and there was no apparent viciousness in that one."

She bent her head with a little gesture of satisfaction.

"Thank you. Now, if you care to listen, I will tell you the story of my great-aunt, who died at the age of seventeen. A moment, first!"

She lifted the silk-covered speaking-tube beside her.

"Drive down to Washington Square and back," she gave direction. "Not too fast, Thompson."

She leaned back, looking down at her clasped hands as if at a book whose pages she read. She began quite easily and naturally; with an unhurried ease of narration. The man watched her intently, but not rudely, not moving or interrupting her.

"In the year 1870, in one of France's smaller cities, a young girl stood at the window of a house and watched a body of Prussian troops march past. She was not quite seventeen, and the full, flounced frock of pink and white silk that she wore was her first ball gown.

"I know that she was small, with a fair, dimpled, childish face; and that she wore her yellow hair in a great coil low on her neck, with a mass of short curls tied with pink ribbon on either side of her face. Her name was Adora Hamilton, and she was the step-daughter of the Prussian commander before whom the city had fallen, two weeks before this afternoon. Her American mother had contracted a second marriage with the officer when Adora was thirteen years old. The little girl had finished her education in Philadelphia, and had come to join her mother almost as the war with France was declared.

"She was dressed, now, for a banquet in celebration of the victory to be given in the town hall of the conquered city.

"She had, indeed, left her dressing-table to run to the window at the sound of drums. She carried in her hand a bracelet which she had been about to clasp around her arm when the interruption came; a mosaic bracelet of linked, black-enamel medallions inlaid in a stiff design of baskets of flowers. Pushing open the long window, which opened like a door from ceiling to floor, she looked between the lace curtains.

"Her room was on the ground floor, so that she stood almost on a level with the men riding by in the twilight. They were a detachment bringing in some prisoners taken that day, for the city was being used as a headquarters while the commanding officer was there. As Adora reached the window, a counter-moving body of troops on the boulevard beyond halted the first detachment to await their passing.

"You will remember that Adora Hamilton was biased in favor of the Prussians both by her mother's marriage and by association with the Prussian officers, who had showered the American beauty with gallantries and attentions ever since her first arrival among them. She was something of an heiress, and step-daughter of a noble very high in rank and in court favor. She was quite as ignorant of politics as most seventeen-year-old girls were—and are. And it had been impressed upon her that the French were a wicked, dissipated, justly defeated nation.

"One of the French prisoners had been halted exactly opposite her window. When she fluttered between the curtains, an apple-blossom picture, no doubt, he chanced to turn his head and see her.

"Of this gentleman I know little, except that he was young, bore all the marks of bitter conflict, and had suffered a wound in the right arm. Regardless of the wound, his arms had been bound behind him with so severe a caution that blood dripped steadily upon the cobble pavement as he stood beside the horse of the nearest trooper, and anguish whitened the face he forebade to betray any other sign to his conquerors. But I know that Adora Hamilton never had seen him before, and that he did not speak or appeal to her in any way.

"Add to this, that she had been bred to the most extreme reserve and strict decorum in an academy which cherished

Victorian ideals, and held young ladies hemmed in as by harem traditions.

CHAPTER II.

ADORA'S HUSBAND.

"I HAVE said that it was dusk, and the attention of the soldiers was centered upon their comrades passing on the next street," continued Anne Van Huyden without change of tone. "Adora leaned from her window and grasped his sleeve in her dimpled little hands, drawing him toward her. On either side of the window grew tall bushes, now casting heavy shadows. In an instant these shadows enfolded him, and sheltered his passing into the room beside the girl. Oh, I admit that it sounds improbable! Nevertheless, the feat was accomplished. Perhaps it helped that his guards were mounted, while he was on foot and so a trifle below their natural level of vision.

"With hardy adroitness, Adora hurried her rescued captive into the dimness of the room and stood him flat against the wall beside the window itself. The voluminous lace draperies covered him from a casual glance. She herself continued to stand in her place, surveying the street with perfect calmness.

"The French officer was missed almost on the instant. At once the street was plunged in uproar. The Prussian in command rode straight to Adora's window, with a savage demand as to whose was the house.

"'The house of the Field Marshal Baron Von Such-and-Such, and I am his daughter,' the young girl replied.

"The startled Prussian bent to his horse's mane in salute, and craved only to know if the gracious lady had noticed the escape of the prisoner, who was a rogue of importance.

"'I saw a man glide along in the shadow of the house and into that alley,' she returned with every appearance of candor. 'Of course, I did not know that he was an escaping prisoner. I did not think of him at all, sir. I looked at our soldiers.'

"The hunt swirled through the streets, the alarm spreading and widening. She had the courage to light the candles on her dressing-table before drawing the heavy curtains across her window, moving quite slowly and naturally so that watching eyes without might see the whole sweep of the large room and find no presence save her own. When the curtains were closed, she set a screen before them to guard against the parting of a fold, and bolted the door into the house.

"Then she faced her man, who had awaited her pleasure where she first stationed him. It must have been a strange gaze, surely, that passed between these two!

"'You must be better hidden, sir.' The girl spoke first. 'My mother will presently come here for me. My maid I could silence, but not my mother.'

"'Mademoiselle, I was mad to risk your safety,' he answered. 'It is dark outside now. I will lay my gratitude at your feet, and go at once.'

"'How?' she asked.

"'As I came: through the window. If you would but add to your charity by freeing my hands—'

"'The street is crowded with soldiers, and guards have been posted,' she told him. 'I saw that much when I drew the curtains. The only door to this room opens upon a hall always full of servants and the baron's military attendants. There is no way that you can go without destroying us both.'

"'But—' he essayed protest.

"'You must stay,' she decided. 'At least until later!'

"With scissors from her embroidery bag she hacked through the strap binding his wrists. At the agony of returning circulation he came near losing consciousness. She held her silver scent-bottle to his nostrils, driving off that menace. She hastily bound up his wounded arm with a scarf.

"Outside, the street still roared and hummed with the search. The hour of the banquet drew very near.

"'There is no place of hiding in the room, *mademoiselle*,' he pointed out to her, when the bandaging was finished.

"'Yes,' she contradicted him; and showed the draped recess in which stood the large, old-fashioned bed.

"He rebelled at that. He would not so endanger her; no, not for this life and the next! He told her she was a child, and mad. Both of which statements were quite true. But she triumphed. For him to be seen leaving her room would have been as fatal to her as his presence discovered there.

"So she prevailed, because there was nothing else to be done. Far back in the drapery-shadowed depths she bestowed him, and spread the satin and lace coverlets smooth above him; artfully disposing pillows and bolster to aid concealment. Then she left the bed-curtains drawn enough to cast a shade, yet open enough to show an apparently empty expanse.

"As she finished, there was a knock at the door. The girl swept out of sight the signs of disorder and went to open. Before she could do so, a little figure rose from a stool in the deep doorway, rubbing sleepy eyes and curtsying. It was Adora's maid; a half-grown negro girl who had come with her mistress from Philadelphia. All this time she had been drowsing there unseen.

"There was no opportunity now for speech between her and her dismayed mistress, while Adora's mother waited for admittance. The girl drew back, and the negress opened the door.

"The baroness entered in full costume for the banquet. The carriage and escort waited, and she had come for her daughter. Adora was ready and submissive. The broadly smiling maid ran to bring a rose-colored cloak and hood. But as these were being put on, the baroness uttered a cry of surprise and vexation. There were streaks of crimson spotting Miss Hamilton's gown!

"Adora neither flinched nor showed terror. In her hand she held the stained embroidery scissors, snatched from a chair in passing lest they cause remark, and which she had not yet found an opportunity to lay aside unseen. Without a frown or quiver, she closed her fingers on the sharp points. Yes, she had cut herself, she answered, and held out her bleeding hand in witness.

"I imagine blood must have looked pathetic on those soft, dimpled fingers. Certainly the sight distracted the older lady from too close questioning as to its cause. Daphne, her dark face all concern, was set hurriedly to work repairing the mishap as best she might. This accomplished, Adora was borne off to the festival.

"After she left a soldier was stationed at the door of the room; not in suspicion of the gracious young lady, but because every possible exit from the house was thus guarded. The lost prisoner was of importance and the search for him was not likely to be abandoned. There had been a suggestion that he might have slipped into the cellar and concealed himself in some secret place known to the former French owners of the mansion, where he could await a proper occasion to leave unseen.

"The negress stayed in the room, huddled in a chair near the window, rolling her large eyes now and then toward the open door and the uniformed sentry.

"What the French gentleman endured through the following hours, or how Adora played her part of light-hearted belle throughout the long banquet and ball, is left to one to guess. Never during that evening did he have even a moment when he might have hoped to make his way to the street and take his chances there. To move was to be heard by the lounging guard—and bring disgrace upon the girl, who would be called a traitress.

"At two in the morning the revelers came home—no doubt gayly escorted. Adora came to her room, and her mother with her.

"Upon their good nights and chat of the ball broke in a summons at the door. Daphne opened, and revealed the field marshal baron with two of his attendants.

"The baron was stiffly apologetic, but resolved in his purpose. A street gamin had been found who vowed he had seen the escaping prisoner climb into the window between the lilac-bushes at the time of the evasion. Miss Hamilton's apartment must be searched at once. The fellow might have slipped in here—of course, without her knowledge!

"The baroness nearly swooned with horror at the suggestion of such peril to Adora, and clasped the girl in her arms in a spasm of outraged delicacy. A secret intruder? Yes, search; search, by all means!

"Adora had no spasms. She calmly declared that the thing was impossible. Her window had been fastened shut when the troops passed; moreover, she herself had stood looking out at the time.

"'Through the glass panes?' demanded the baron.

"'Yes,' she answered; 'looking through the glass.'

"Yet it had been seen open after the escape by one of the baron's own officers. How was that?

"Here an unexpected ally came to Adora's aid: the little negro maid volunteered the statement that she herself had opened the window after missy went back to her dressing table, because it was warm in the room.

"Staring at them both, the baron held out to his stepdaughter her black-enamel bracelet inlaid with baskets of flowers in colored mosaic. A soldier had picked it up beneath her window at the first alarm to a search.

"Adora made a gallant attempt to cover her initial mistake in declaring the window shut. She answered that she had opened the window for a moment to reply to the questions of the officer in command of the soldiers, but had closed it again immediately afterward; an incident she had at first forgotten in speaking now. No doubt she had lost the bracelet at that time.

"Her stepfather was polite in agreeing, but he was not swerved from his determination. The room must be searched.

"The girl seated herself on the edge of the bed in her foam of silken flounces and puffed polonaise, moving her hands in a gesture of offended resignation. Very well, then; let them search and finish the tiresome matter. She was much fatigued, and the hour was late. Throughout the search she sat there, her head high, the childish yellow curls brushing cheeks rosed by desperation, fluttering a pink-plumed fan that she had carried to the ball.

"The examination was nearly ended when one of the attendants stooped and lifted from the flowered carpet beside the bed that leather cavalry strap which had bound the hunted man's wrists. Adora was requested to rise, that the alcove which held the bed might be investigated. She had no choice; as she hesitated, the baron took her hand and drew her away.

"Of course, there was no more concealment to be maintained. Nor could the cornered man attempt resistance if he desired, since he was unarmed and wounded. The French officer was dragged forth to confront the group of stricken witnesses.

"He did his best. Facing the baron and baroness, he declared that he had stolen into the room while the young girl and her maid were at the rear, busied at the dressing-table, and could not have seen him. He had gained the alcove and hidden himself entirely without their knowledge, hoping to slip away from his pursuers later.

"The honorable lie would not serve; it could not. The cut strap, the skilful bandage on his right arm, the perfection of his concealment in the bed—all these cried out against Adora.

"'*Vicomte,*' said the baron glacially, 'it accords with the honor of my house to accept your story without question. It shall appear as you have said. Neverthe-

less, a public trial for you is now out of the possibilities we have to consider. Any investigation of this matter is a menace to that honor. You will understand that the arrangement forced upon me is not of my choosing, and is repugnant to me also. I shall know how to silence my own men here. The baroness and Miss Hamilton will be silent. After you are shot in trying to escape—'

"'*Monsieur*,' replied the Frenchman, 'when you imply any reproach to *mademoiselle*, or that she is less than an angel of pity and goodness, you lie. And when you speak of such work as assassination before ladies, you are ill-bred.'

"'It may be so, from your point of view,' returned the other. 'Yet, *vicomte*, if you have any regard for the name of the young woman who sheltered you in this place, you will now leave my house quietly with these guards and attract no eyes by outcry or useless resistance.'

"'You may rest assured that I will do so,' answered the *vicomte*. 'Whether I am shot to-night or to-morrow is a matter of little moment. But I demand of you—and I implore in this your intercession, *madame*—that you bring here a churchman of some sort who will do me the infinite honor to make *mademoiselle* my wife before I go. And my apology to you, *mademoiselle*, is that I see no other way to leave you in that high place in men's eyes which is your right.'"

The man who had shoveled snow uttered an exclamation. Miss Van Huyden shrugged her shoulders with an air of deprecation, glancing up at him.

"Yes, it is the overdone climax of a hundred romances, I know. But I am telling you a relation of actual events, and so am powerless to add originality."

"She married him?"

"What else was to be done? Consider the situation, and that no one, not even the girl's mother, could or ever did credit the tale that the pair had been strangers until that night. They were stamped as lovers who had reached the point of risking all for one another.

"Yes, they were married. All alone, before the hostile, contemptuous group of witnesses, Adora Hamilton stood up beside the haggard young prisoner and was made his wife by a priest hurriedly brought in from a near-by chapel. The mother sobbed in a chair, overcome. The stepfather turned his back on the ceremony to give his grim instructions to one of the men who had led the search.

"When it was over the *vicomte* kissed his wife's hand, her forehead, and her lips. At the door he turned between his guards and bowed to her; and she curtsied to him. The whole party filed out of the room of the girl who had disgraced the household. The baroness would have relented, perhaps, but Adora had only one sentence for all alike:

"'Leave me until morning.'

"So they left her with the little negro maid, Daphne.

"Again I will ask you to recall that she was only seventeen, that she never had set foot unattended in a street, and that she had no knowledge of this city at all. For all that, she climbed out that long window by which the *vicomte* had entered. The negress was left behind to answer any questioners who might come to the locked door, and to hinder pursuit.

"Across the dark city filled with a rioting, victorious soldiery, the girl fled, a black cloak wrapped about her ballroom finery. Rain had begun to fall in a cold, ice-touched drizzle. Her frail pink-satin slippers and silk stockings were strange footgear for the muddy pavements. Her curly head was covered by a thin veil snatched up by way of disguise rather than protection.

"At four in the morning she fell against the door of the American consulate. A sleep-dazed official was summoned from his bed to meet the drenched, pathetic little figure that had staggered into his hall.

"'I am an American,' gasped Adora. 'Save my husband, sir! The Prussians murder him in the streets!"

"The consul took her to his wife, learned the story, and promised the aid that he knew would be of no avail. He forebore to tell the girl that her marriage had not made her husband an American, but had made her a Frenchwoman.

"When he went down again, in the dawn-grayed street before the consulate he encountered a Prussian officer with whom he was acquainted. The American asked if the escaped prisoner of the evening before had been found.

"'Better than that!' was the laughing answer. 'He was cornered in an alleyway, half an hour ago, and shot through the head.'

"Adora lived six weeks after that night. Exposure following excitement and shock had left her with a heavy cold and fever which burned her away as flame burns a candle. She never would see any of her friends except the little negress and her mother, nor would she return to her step-father's house even to hush scandal. She was bitterly wounded by the baroness's refusal to believe her story, and was most at ease when left alone with Daphne.

"Never at any time did she express the slightest regret or repentance for her actions.

"She died; she was cut off from life, as we understand it, from the hour she ran from her dressing-table to see the French prisoner beyond her window."

CHAPTER III.

PRIDE—AND PRIDE.

THE limousine rolled on to another block while silence held its occupants.

"You related that as if you had witnessed it," the man opposite Anne Van Huyden finally said.

"I have, through the eyes of another," she answered. "I have said that Adora Hamilton was my great-aunt. The little negro maid, grown to middle age, was my nurse. After Adora's death Daphne was sent home to my grandfather's house. She loved to tell and retell, in the freedom of the nursery, the story of her one dramatic experience.

"In my childhood the story of Aunt Adora was to me the triumph of all fairy-tales, the bringing home of romance. It had for me all the allure that tragedy has for youth. I have also Adora's diary, kept during her days at school, and a long letter written to a girl cousin whom she dearly loved, after she lay ill in the consul's house. And I have the mosaic bracelet of black enamel inlaid with baskets of flowers, that betrayed her."

"'A rose, she lived a rose's time,'" he quoted to her. "Poor little child-woman!"

"But why?" exclaimed Miss Van Huyden, lifting the fire of her dark glance to his. She struck her gloved palm lightly on the seat beside her in her vehemence. "*Why* did she do it? That is the puzzle. That is what discredited her story and alienated her even from her mother: the absolute incredibility of the thing. What moved her to draw that French prisoner into her life, to fight for him, lie for him, die for him?

"Not love, surely! Even love at first sight, as it is called, cannot be born full-grown at a bare crossing of glances by two strangers. Common sense denies that. There must be more, much more, for love to start into being and stand so fatally steadfast. Pity, you will say? But she must have seen scores of wounded prisoners before that day. Why must she strive to save this one at any cost? When she led him into her room she did not know he was condemned to death, and that he was not an ordinary prisoner of war, merely on his way to some military camp where he would be detained until peace was made. Why, then, did she do it? Why, *why?*"

The man moved, then closed his lips for an instant.

"You have some answer," he suggested. A shade of tolerant and good-humored irony touched his speech, not

unlike a grown person might use to an over-confident child. "An answer that contents you?"

She caught the new note in his voice, and resented it without understanding its cause.

"Yes, I have; to-day," she stated. "Never before — although I have wondered; ever since I was a child I have wondered and questioned Daphne. To-day—"

"To-day?"

She looked him in the eyes with cool, resolved frankness.

"To-day I passed you on my way to Dorian's shop. I watched you from an upper window, where Mr. Dorian was displaying some wares to me. And on the way back, when you looked at me as I sat in the car, I was sure.

"Of course, if I am mistaken you may tell me so; but I think that I am not. I can understand what mastered Adora Hamilton, because I felt an impulse toward you that was as if some urgent need of yours clutched at my help and would not be denied. That was what I meant when I told you this episode of ours was a study in impulse; those impulses which can neither be analyzed nor traced.

"Only, I am not seventeen and I am not Victorian. I could have put aside that impulse easily, had I chosen. And I warn you that a false note touched now will convince me that my experiment is a mistake and my inner urge to sympathy merely indigestion; when I will close my caprice by bidding you good-afternoon."

"A hard dictum!" he demurred, smiling. "Surely only a master-player should be required to strike the right note in a new chord at the first touch. But at least I can be honest, if not artistic. You say that you divined in me the appeal of some need to which you would give help?"

"Yes. But I did not mean that you were conscious of making the appeal; I am sure that you were not."

"Thank you. I think you have been right in everything you have said. It is true that I am most hotly consumed by an impatient need which gives me no rest; although your knowledge of this savers of black magic, it is correct so far. Yet I warn you, in my turn, that the aid needed is sordid and unromantic to the last degree. I do not doubt that the vicomte would have preferred death to accepting such a form of rescue from a lady. Yet—I am not ashamed."

"What is it?"

He made a gesture, half whimsical, half resigned, as one surrendering to a fate in petticoats.

"I am French; I want to join my colors; I have not the money to take me there."

"You—French?" she exclaimed.

He smiled at her astonishment.

"Like Miss Hamilton, I had an American mother. I have lived enough in both countries to pass in either, I believe. I assure you that had America need of me, you would find me a good American. But now it is France."

"You wish to enlist?"

"To return," he corrected. "I was reared to the army and hold a commission."

She rested her chin in her hand, looking out. The car was rounding Washington Square, now, moving slowly as the mistress had directed. As she offered no new suggestion, the chauffeur turned back, up Fifth Avenue. It was not difficult to guess that the lady's home lay not far aside from that sparkling thoroughfare, observing the fidelity with which her servants adhered to its neighborhood.

The guest's deep blue eyes flashed a glance out the window; an appraising, rather wistful glance that embraced the old square and as much of its environs as were visible. One might have said that he looked for something, then as swiftly looked away from it and returned his attention to the girl opposite. His expression was keenly interested as he studied, always with well-bred discretion, the pro-

file of Anne Van Huyden as relieved against the afternoon glow.

"Of course, I am a very unsatisfactory adventurer," the girl said, without turning toward her companion. "Romantically, I should hurriedly press into your reluctant hands my watch and rings, without question and with moistened eyes."

"Would you say 'reluctant hands,' after my shameless challenge?" he wondered.

An unforseen dimple indented her cream-satin cheek.

"Perhaps 'fearless' would be better," she conceded. "But—I am the daughter of a very practical man, as well as a kinswoman of Adora. Would you care to tell me how snow-shoveling leads to France?"

"Suspicious would be better than practical," he criticised. His smile of sheer mischief disarmed her, as she swung about in amazed anger. "Pardon, pardon—but remember we are being frank! Of course I am willing to explain. Why not?

"You see, I am a sculptor. I was a sculptor before I was a soldier, since I remember modeling in mashed potatoes at the age of five; the incident was impressed upon my memory by certain circumstances following the amusement. Three years ago I resigned from the army in order to give all my time to this work, instead of a part. I came to New York, then, to stay. I have managed pretty well, until now. Now, I need a surplus that I no longer possess. I want to get back at once. So—I shovel."

"Two dollars a day," she meditated.

"One seventy-five. But it is clear gain. I am not fastidious—on occasion; I can go third-class. Steerage has its difficulties as well as unpleasantnesses. Oh, if the snow lasts I shall be off in a month. Still, a wasted month— Remember, *you* first offered help. You challenged me, as it were."

"Yes," she answered. "Yes."

Color burned warmly in her usually cool cheek. Few women escape the world-old admiration for the warrior. It was not possible for Anne Van Huyden to ignore the fact that the man opposite was asking her to aid to certain peril and even probable death. She admired, too, the courage of another sort which suffered him to beg for his country when he would have starved rather than beg for himself. She fancied that she could read so much in his resolved young face of pride twin-natured with his gaiety; although more subtle things were written there which baffled her curiosity.

Very slowly she began to draw off her right glove with a delicate deliberation. Then man said nothing more, watching her action with his air of contemplative interest in all she did. The glove reached to Miss Van Huyden's elbow. As it was withdrawn it revealed allurements of arm and wrist not unworthy of contemplation, and finally a slim hand bare of jewels and in no need of their adornment. Into the empty glove she slipped a violet-leather purse taken from her muff.

"Let us not be impulsive by halves," she said. "I have asked, and you have answered. The first hard step was mine, and you will admit that I did not falter in taking it. Now let the second be yours; for to accept is much harder than to give, and demands a more generous spirit. Please believe I shall hope for you a happier success than Adora's soldier had; although I may never know of it."

She held out to him her ungloved hand. He took it quietly in his, and instantly released it.

"Thank you," he responded. "I shall remember your kindness perhaps less than your courage. For I am not so dull as not to comprehend how brave a young girl is who braves convention."

"Do you know that you have not once said exactly what I expected, during our experiment?" she questioned curiously.

"I did not know, but I hope not."

She laughed.

"Then, did you know that I never should have forgiven you for a sentimentality or mock-heroics?"

"Perhaps I was even clever enough for that."

She had touched a bell, and the car drew slowly toward the curb. But she and the man continued to look steadily, with an odd eagerness, at one another. It was as if each strove to fix a portrait of the other, as a photographer fixes a picture upon his negative that time fails to efface. When the footman opened the car door, staring in ill-concealed astonishment at the man whom he had not seen enter, Anne Van Huyden and her guest broke their knit regard with a certain reluctance.

"*Dieu vous garde,*" she said to him in his own language, with a smile that strove to rob the good wish of its seriousness. "Good luck!" And she gave him the glove.

What he said fully sustained his attributed quality of unexpectedness. Bareheaded on the sidewalk opposite her, the swirl of the avenue all about them, the sunlight bright on his face and the white glove dangling from his hand, he addressed her with a staccato abruptness and earnestness:

"I have to tell you! You will not comprehend, you may even be angry; but I must tell you. You do not understand Adora Hamilton at all. Some day, perhaps— But now, not at all! Not yet!"

Entirely bewildered, she saw him step back with a charming bow. Her servant closed the door, and the car rolled away.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MARBLE-PLAYER.

"I MIGHT have fallen in love yesterday," confided Anne Van Huyden, resting her smooth white elbows on the table with a graceful ignoring of etiquette and gazing pensively at the crimson-shaded candle before her.

"Why didn't you?" inquired her father, amused. "You should gain some idea of the emotions that you inflict on others."

"I do not, I really do not wonder that mother married you at the age of eighteen," she nodded. "It is a privilege few enjoy to meet such gallantry at home as she and I bask in. It is altogether your fault that I am still a spinster at twenty-five."

"Not until next June," corrected Mrs. Van Huyden.

"Which, dear? A spinster, or twenty-five?" her daughter questioned, still contemplating the candle.

"You are twenty-four. Why exaggerate? And who was the man?"

"You remind me of a stupidity! I did not find out his name. One could scarcely have asked him point blank, under the circumstances; still there are ways— But I know that he was an officer in the French army; at least, he was on his way to resume being one. Otherwise, he was a sculptor. He was alluring as sinfulness. I have not the slightest idea why he affected me that way, for I never in my life saw a grown person who looked less sinful. In fact, he was provokingly blameless. And he certainly was industrious."

"So is the devil," interpolated Mr. Van Huyden.

"Thank you for the caution, dear darling. Still, I never heard of Satan working at just the kind of labor with which my officer was toiling."

"How did you meet him, Anne?" asked Mrs. Van Huyden. "Or rather, where?"

Anne turned her gaze from the candle and regarded her mother with meditative eyes like dark pools of clear water. Then she smiled, suddenly and mischievously.

"Excuse me, dear. There are things that no considerate daughter should tell so well brought-up a mother; indeed, there are! He has gone to France, to be killed, very probably. And I did not fall in love, you know. There was not time for such a proceeding."

"I should have liked to see the man who was so potentially dangerous to you," observed her father.

"I should have liked that, too," she agreed. She laid on the table a handkerchief which had covered some object in her lap. "Since that cannot be, let me show you something of his. A messenger left it at the house this afternoon—in a biscuit box."

The other two leaned forward to view the souvenir of her adventure Anne's slender, gemmed fingers placed upon the damask. Mr. Van Huyden put on his pince-nez.

It was a statuette, perhaps six inches in height, and it portrayed nothing more classical or romantic than a street-gamin, half crouched in the approved attitude of a player at marbles. But the pose was so animated, so true, the thin little hand advanced with the poised marble was so instinct with action that it was hard to realize the sphere would not shoot before the bent thumb and roll upon the table. And the pinched, scowling, savagely eager face of the miniature gambler was life itself.

"At least," pronounced Mr. Van Huyden in an altered tone, "your man is not a fool, Anne. Nor a sentimentalist!"

"There is not an atom of sentiment in him," said Anne decidedly. "I might have guessed he did not model Cupids and Aphrodites. Of course, if he had been sentimental I should have put him out and loathed him. The circumstances— And yet—"

"Yet?"

She turned the statuette between her fingers and shook her head; crowned now by a beautifully smooth tower of shining auburn hair that lent her a quite imperial stateliness, instead of the coquetry of the little French hat she had worn the afternoon before. Her expression was shaded by vague dissatisfaction that laughed at its own existence.

"Yet—I could almost wish that he had been! There would have been a melancholy pleasure in recalling it; after he is shot."

"You are quite determined to have him shot?"

"No. But something whispers in my ear that he is of a rash temper and will not take care of himself unduly. He was so frightfully anxious to be off."

"It is to be hoped, for the preservation of our household, that the gentleman is at least shot to a disfiguring extent," shrugged Mr. Van Huyden, rising as his wife rose. "He has made an alarming impression."

"Oh, do you think that would make any difference?" wondered the girl, lifting her eyebrows. "Does one really value a man because he has all his arms and legs and noses? Or, because—"

"Because, by all means," said her father.

But he looked intently at his daughter as she picked up the plaster model and followed her mother out of the room. He did not understand any of his sons as well as he understood Anne. They were intimately alike, these two. He understood now that for some reason she wanted him to know of this episode, of which she, nevertheless, was willing to tell so little.

Why? In preparation for a future possibility that she vaguely foresaw? Did she feel, and not with displeasure, that the man who had given her the statuette would seek her out, should he ever return from the great war? Or was it merely that she had had some little adventure, and disliked the musty air of secrecy to hang about it? Anne had no taste for intrigue.

He could not tell. But he felt an alien influence at work in her for the first time; and felt it with a pang of tender jealousy.

Being a bit given to self-analysis, Anne herself realized that the "snow-shoveling man," as she catalogued him, lingered in her mind to an unwarrantable extent. The arrival of the statuette had added a fresh interest to the episode, but as a spur to memory it had not been needed. She wondered if the man could possibly guess that fact, and what had been his object in making the gift. Or, had he any purpose at all except an expression of gratitude?

It was late that evening, after midnight, indeed, when she found leisure to review the affair in the calm and pleasant solitude of her own room. Heretofore, her thoughts had been broken into small groups and interrupted by outside claimants to attention. She set the statuette amid the dainty litter of her toilet-table, and leaned lazily back in her low chair to survey her new possession.

Beside the marble-player her violet leather purse lay; empty, of course, except for the cards it had contained. She had forgotten the cards in giving the purse, but she saw no reason to regret that they had supplied him with her name and home as a bit of unasked knowledge. She was not so anxious to close the innocent adventure.

"Only a Frenchman would have thought to send back the purse that matched my frock," she mused, half aloud. "And only a man at least half American would have had the idea of sending it and the model in an old biscuit-box! Such lamentable practicality! Such a painful lack of sentiment is—inspiring!"

Her lips curled in a droll smile. But presently the smile faded. She leaned forward, her chin in her palm, and considered that empty biscuit carton which now lay in a silk-lined, ivory-willow waste-basket beside her desk. Somehow it was rather a pathetic object in that place. It had even an air of brown-cardboard humility, although its sturdy sides were unbroken.

"Now, I wonder—" breathed the girl. "Did he, perhaps, live upon five-cent soda-crackers, and—such things? Could he have been really poor; poor like that? An artist and an officer—surely he must have had friends!"

If he had friends, obviously they were not those of whom he could or would borrow; or why was he shoveling snow in the streets? She recalled that he had worn no overcoat. It returned to her recollection, with a little stab, that he had shivered when he stepped out of the warmed interior of the limousine into the winter wind.

What if that clean, boyish leanness of his was *not* just the spareness of youth, as she had assumed? She winced from the suggestion. It might be; yet how full of vitality he had seemed, and how nonchalantly gay! Could any one be like that who suffered privation? She did not know. She knew nothing of actual life; nothing worth while.

Anne Van Huyden lifted her gaze to the ivory-framed mirror; which held before her a girl in a cream-hued negligée of silk and lace, whose shining lengths of straight, warm hair fell around her shoulders and trailed across her knees, whose small hands bore exquisite testimony to their own idleness, whose crossed feet, in mules of white satin and fur, had never traveled any road they did not will.

"Decidedly, you know very little," she apostrophized her reflection. "And I am afraid, I am very much afraid, my dear, that you have never cared to learn. You have been much too comfortable. You love to be comfortable; why deny it? And you have every reason to expect to be comfortable all your life! Still, one might share some of that sort of thing. It does not seem to be—disagreeable—work."

The little model of the street gamin scowled at her from among her gold-and-ivory brushes and tinted bottles of sweet essences. He was ridiculously neighbored by a fragile vase containing some lemon-blossoms, whose thick velvet petals brushed his round little skull and wrapped him in Sicilian fragrance.

"You needn't reproach me," she nodded at him. "You are a gambler. And a scamp! Now, I wonder why he sent you? It isn't like him, somehow, to do anything so natural as to bestow a mere souvenir. I am quite sure that he meant something else. But how amazingly clever he is to have made you at all! And I wonder why he did not sell you instead of shoveling snow for his passage to France?"

She rose and walked to a window, pushing aside the draperies. Her ears had not tricked her; snow was hissing wickedly against the panes. Another blizzard had clutched New York.

"If the snow lasts, I shall be off soon," he had said. Well, he must be "off" now, thanks to her effrontery in speaking to him. He would not have to shovel in the freezing streets to-morrow. But how well he had done it—with what whole-hearted energy and cheerfulness!

It occurred to her with something of a shock, after a time of vague musing, that the trenches in Belgium or France must be distinctly more unpleasant than street-cleaning in New York. Why had she not thought of that fact before? Was she growing dull, or merely sleepy? Sleepy, it was to be hoped! She turned her head and regarded the waiting luxury of her couch.

Suddenly she was conscious of a new and profound pity for the women who loved men at the front. How did they bear it? How could they?

Why had the man told her that she did not understand Adora Hamilton — yet? He had said it so earnestly; she could feel now in her eyes the dazzling intensity of his eyes as he spoke. Yes, that was actually the word and the sensation: his glance had dazzled her senses, glammoured her sense. Why? What was the matter with her, Anne Van Huyden, that she should be affected this way, or trouble her calm self about a stranger's look or meaning?

Moreover, she *did* understand Adora!

Abruptly she began to laugh, moving toward the electric-light switch while smothering a yawn.

"At least Great-Aunt Adora and I have one taste in common," she meditated. "We collect our vicomtes in damaged condition. But I cordially hope my experience will not prove as costly as hers. I am *not* a heroine!"

Later she sat up in her bed to stare into the darkness.

"Did he mean that Adora was in love with the man, after all?" she questioned herself. "But, no! It would have been absurd—and," as an afterthought, "impertinent! Very, very—absurd!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CHEAT.

IT was astounding how that hour with a stranger had colored all Anne Van Huyden's thoughts. No one could have been more puzzled by the fact than was Anne herself. Not that she thought of him all the time, of course; it was merely that she thought of him with inexplicable frequency.

"There do exist people," she remarked to her father, one day, "to know whom is to be haunted. In an instant the matter is accomplished. They — they pervade one—as a drop of coloring fluid in a glass of clear water immediately tints the whole mass. Did you ever feel anything like that?"

"Yes. Your mother affected me very much that way until we were married."

"Dear me!" lightly ejaculated Anne. But she flushed like a débutante.

"And—does marriage cure?" she added presently, with a curiosity half-defiant.

"No, and yes. It tinges the whole world with the new color, and so settles the disturbed element to content."

"And I do not believe you even considered poetry as a profession," she marveled, shaking her head at him.

Mr. Van Huyden did not reply to the thrust of defensive raillery. He was too finely intelligent to ask questions, but his regard of infinitely kind invitation brought her across the room to nestle against him in a fugitive caress, light as the brush of a bird's wing.

"If ever there should be any one to tell about," she whispered, "you and mother would hear first of all. I—I am *not* a secret and romantic person. But there is no one, of course. No one! If there were— But I am a very prosaic spinster."

"What have you on your arm, Anne, under that chiffon sleeve?"

Anne glanced down, then smoothed the thin, delicate blue fabric beneath which something dark encircled the fairness of her wrist.

"That?" carelessly. "Oh, that is just Great-Aunt Adora Hamilton's bracelet. You know those quaint bits are in again. It really is a lovely piece of Roman mosaic, isn't it, dear?"

"Whoever it might be?" questioned Mr. Van Huyden, irrelevantly grave and holding before his own her large, dark eyes with their odd lights of warm purple. "Is that a promise, girl?"

"It is a promise." The heliotrope of her eyes misted, but she stanchly met his gaze, not feigning to misunderstand. "First to you and mother, if—if it ever comes. Prince or beggar, hero or thief, good or bad—you shall know, dear—dearest!"

He kissed her.

The figurine of the marble-player continued to crouch on the ivory-and-gold toilet-table in Miss Van Huyden's room. This was a mistake, if his owner wished to forget his creator.

From that point of view, the conversation with her father was also a mistake. It seemed to lend a sanction and sober reality to the episode of the vicomte-in-the-snow, as Anne mentally catalogued the young man of the shovel in her lack of information as to his name.

She regretted that ignorance when she began to read the war news in the newspapers. It would have been amusing to look for his name now and then.

She had no idea of the difficulty a man might meet in reaching the fighting zones. But, allowing for reasonable delays, she reckoned that a month after their meeting he must be where he had desired.

"And I hope his savage instincts are satisfied," she told herself with a shrug.

In her heart she profoundly admired his love of country. She harbored an unacknowledged vision, at the very back of her mind, of his coming home at the end of the war covered with glory and an order or two bestowed for valor, perhaps just a trifle wounded; of his seeking her out to thank her for the opportunity to win his laurels, and—and—

She usually halted there. Once or twice she continued the picture a trifle further.

And then, six weeks after she had taken him from the streets, she saw him again.

Anne was descending the steps of a hall on Forty-Second Street with two of her friends. They had attended a Paderewski recital together, sharing as they did a rare and delightful sympathy of tastes. The splendid magic of the master-player glamoured the three young women still, so that they moved slowly and in silence; the bright, noisy afternoon into which they stepped jarring upon their mood.

One of them was that bride-to-be for whom Anne Van Huyden had been shopping at Dorian's the day she met and dared adventure. The other was a young wife of two years' standing, who patronized them both, as mere maids. And the eyes of all three were clouded with dreams.

Anne Van Huyden saw her man from the elevation of the steps, which set her above the crowds across whose shifting mass her gaze indifferently drifted. Without that chance advantage of position, she might never have known of his presence in the city. Certainly she expected less that sight than any other. Indeed, she could not credit what she saw, at first, but stood arrested in staring doubt.

The vicomte-in-the-snow had emerged from a park which adjoined the great white library opposite. He sauntered out into Forty-Second Street, moving with a deliberate slowness apparently care-free and content. He presented every appearance of a man who has no immediate employment and seeks for none. He was better dressed than before, and wore an overcoat evidently new, if not expensive.

The sun shone on a wave of his fair hair visible under his cap, and glinted in the deep blue eyes she had thought so candid.

While the startled girl watched, he smiled at a newsboy who ran up to him; smiled with so sunny a good-humor that the boy grinned back instead of scowling at his failure to make a sale of his wares.

"What is it, Anne?" the bride-to-be was laughing, slipping her hand through Anne's arm and endeavoring to follow her gaze with playful curiosity. "I don't see an interesting thing. Do you? Come, 'fess up!"

"No," denied Anne, her cool voice bitter with self-scorn. "Nothing but a mistake, Marion."

Did the man hear? Impossible, in the roaring din of the street that seethed between them, she knew. Yet he turned toward the stream of the audience flowing from the building where the recital had been given; he turned that way, and glanced up.

Did he see his benefactress? He did not meet the burning contempt of her gaze in any way that she could tell. But he did turn hurriedly aside and plunged under a covered passageway which replaced the sidewalk at that spot during some building operations.

His retreat resembled a flight, and perhaps was one. She believed it to be the panic of guilt detected.

Anne went on to tea with her friends. They went to a tea-room in one of the large hotels where they were assured of meeting others of their own circle. Not being disappointed in this anticipation, they spent a gay and frivolous hour diversified by chat and dancing.

Anne danced with particular zest, and graciously accepted enough engagements to fill her days for a fortnight in advance. She did not return home until six o'clock, and at once hurried into the business of dressing for a formal dinner to be followed by that variety of ball at which breakfast is served before the guests finally withdraw.

She avoided looking at the figure of the marble player on her toilet-table during the process of making ready to go out. Anne was too vain to risk an emotion just before a public appearance. She even refused to think of the affair of the man in the street until after her return. He had already cost her quite enough.

She returned rather early, in view of the fact that the late winter dawn was still far away when she came again to her own room. But the festivities had proved too unbearably long for her patience; and her parents were only too glad of the release her weariness offered.

In spite of that weariness, Anne made no immediate move to retire, when she found herself alone. Her cloak thrown aside, she slowly drew a chair opposite the statuette, and sat down.

There could be no doubt. She had been tricked; as deftly cheated of her purse as if her pocket had been picked by force instead of art. And, worst and most stinging recollection, she herself had invited the man to dupe her.

How he must have laughed, or sneered, at her. For since he was here, it was perfectly evident that he had never wished or intended to be anywhere else. He had never dreamed of going to France, or of fighting. He was living upon her money —and keeping out of her sight. Probably he feared her indignation might take the form of seeking the police with a complaint of his sharp practise.

An ex-officer? More probably an ex-convict!

Of course, being a clever rogue, he had seized the easy pretext of the great war to work upon her schoolgirl sentimentality. How dull and credulous she had been! The man did not look French; his English was stamped native. He himself had realized this, and she had accepted without question his ready excuse of being half American.

Anne started in her chair as a new thought scourged her with her stupidity; this was December of the year after the

war commenced. Why, if he had been honest, had the snow-shoveler not joined his colors eighteen months before she met him in the avenue? It was the last point needed to convict him liar and cheat.

And she had told that man the story of Adora Hamilton!

The girl's cheeks blazed at the recollection of how she had told the story; the earnestness which had possessed her and made her strange to herself, with her desire that he should understand as she did. She never had related to any one else that family story which had been the secret obsession and dramatic interest of her own childhood. She never had supposed that she could tell it in its entirety; complete and rounded out from the family traditions, the memories of the colored nurse, and Adora's own diary and letters. But she had done so, and to a common swindler picked up on the street.

After all it was no wonder the man had exploited her folly for his own benefit!

Once, more than once, she had been moved to recount the whole adventure of her meeting with the vicomte-in-the-snow to her father. Now, Anne felt a passionate gratitude to the habitual reticence and new shyness which had restrained her. If any one, any one in her world knew of her farcical folly, it would be more than her pride could endure.

The man knew, of course. Probably he had told the rich joke to his low associates, and her name with Adora's had furnished laughter in some vile saloon. With a savage sweep Anne snatched the statuette from the table and hurled it across to the tiled hearth.

He, a sculptor! She wondered from whom he had stolen that?

It broke, naturally; with scarcely a crash. It was only plaster. The marble player's head flew off and rolled, very like a marble itself, until it lodged under an andiron. From that place of vantage it scowled, a very fury of boyish intensity in the expression of the miniature face. What a superb bit of character work it was!

Abruptly Anne Van Huyden ran forward and stamped the heel of her small satin shoe upon the head.

"Cheat!" she panted viciously. "Cheat, *cheat!*"

CHAPTER VI.

THE LADY'S BLOW.

IT was several days later that Mrs. Van Huyden spoke to her daughter of the statuette.

"You know, Anne," she remarked, "that I went to see about some things for the Florida place to-day. Among the novelties were some new bronze door-porters — I mean those weighted figures one stands against doors to hold them back."

"Yes, dear?" murmured Anne. She was buried in a deep chair, looking a trifle tired and listless.

"Well, one of the figures represented that marble player of which your mysterious artist sent you a copy. But it was called 'The Gamester' officially. It really is extremely good, especially in the bronze. Would you like to have me order one for your rooms down there?"

"Thank you, dear. I should prefer something more cheerful, please," Anne replied steadily.

But a flare of scarlet crossed her cheek. So that was the explanation? The marble-player was a familiar figure in the shops, no doubt in various forms, and her man had simply bought a copy in some cheap place to feed and quiet her sense of the romantic while he lost himself in safe obscurity with her purse.

She did not passively loathe him, she actively hated the trickster. She wanted to punish him; she would have enjoyed sending him to the Island with his fellow fakers and cheats.

Reflection had only confirmed and fixed her first judgment upon seeing him still in the city. There could be no honest explanation of his avoidance of her. Even if one might suppose that some circum-

stances had detained for six weeks the man who represented himself as panting to leave New York for the front, how explain his failure to tell her of the delay?

Surely no honest man would wish to remain under the suspicion he must know he had awakened. He had not come to her or written, even after their meeting on Forty-Second Street had ended all possibility of concealment for him. And then, there was the unanswerable question of why he had not gone to fight for his country a year and a half ago, if at all.

No, she had been deceived.

If only he could know, at least, that his dupe was not still deceived!

That idea, once admitted to Anne's mind, rooted and grew. She wanted to tell the man that she cherished no more sentimental pity for him and made no sentimental excuses; that she understood and despised the farce. In brief, she wanted her woman's privilege of the last word. After that she could forget.

There seemed little likelihood that chance would throw him in her path a third time. New York is not a village with one main street. Also he would studiously avoid places where he might encounter her. How, then, was the last word to be secured?

After a time, by force of much consideration, she evolved one faint possibility. She recalled that when she had last seen him he had just left the park near the public library. Could it be that he was in the habit of going there?

He might live in the neighborhood, or pass his idle hours in the reading-room of the library. Perhaps he used the little park as a lounging place on sunny days when the weather permitted outdoor lounging; as did so many unfortunates and wanderers—and criminals, no doubt! It was a conceivable idea.

After that inspiration Anne was driven past the park whenever her way led her near its neighborhood; which was tolerably often. She would sweep her angry glance across the little expanse of snow and mud cut by winding cement walks flanked with benches; then scrutinize the white façade of the library and the different flights of broad stairs leading to the streets.

She saw many curious and pathetic sights, but she did not see the false soldier.

December stormed into bitter January. February came in, cruelly cold and white-clad as an inquisitor of long ago. Yet Anne never failed to watch for the trickster whom she could neither pardon nor forget.

She found her quarry on a dense, wet, fog-swathed morning, that succeeded a week of biting cold with true New York capriciousness of climate. Anne had driven her father down-town in her own little electric car, and was on her way back to a hat-shop that she especially affected. She was alone, and driving quite slowly when she glimpsed the man.

He was emerging from the very park where she had so often and so vainly looked for him. Apparently he had been reading a newspaper and resting on one of those benches whose rows are like a dreary coast upon which come aground many bits of strange driftwood and wreckage.

Anne saw him thrust the folded journal into his overcoat pocket as he strolled out upon the street. His look of vivid yet serene forcefulness had not left him; although, in the thick, gray light which was all the fog permitted, he seemed thinner and paler than she remembered him.

But Anne had small attention for details in her excited triumph and revivified wrath. She brought her machine to the curbstone with sharp decisiveness of action and halted there. She waited to reveal herself until he was quite near, fearing lest he might again escape her by turning aside and losing himself among the passers-by, although, at this hour, the street was almost empty in comparison to what it had been earlier and would be later.

When her man was almost opposite, quite unsuspecting her presence, Anne flung open the door of her car.

"Come here, sir," she summoned him, coldly imperative.

He started and wheeled quickly, to confront across a space of sidewalk the stormy, beautiful face of the girl who had given him her gracious charity with so frank a daring. Framed in the doorway of the little claret-colored car, her bright waves of hair sweeping cheeks fire-bright with the heat of her indignation, her large eyes drenching him with scorn, she unconsciously presented to him a very different lady from the coolly composed Miss Van Huyden of their last interview.

He flinched. She saw that distinctly. An almost withering pain rushed across his face like a devastating wind. But the visible emotion passed as quickly as a puff of air, leaving his expression again tranquil as she always had seen it, if less gay than when she first found him at work among the group of street-cleaners.

He made no attempt to evade her. Baring his head, he crossed to where she awaited him and stood.

"Have you anything to say, any reason to give, why I should not have you arrested by that police officer over there as a common swindler?" she flung her low-voiced, incoherent anger at him. "You obtained money from me to join your colors in France. You never have left New York. You never meant to leave New York. No doubt the sight of a battlefield would appal you! I have always heard that cheats were also cowards.

"Why did you need to tell me all those contemptible falsehoods? I would have given you my purse out of pure charity, had you asked for it. But, no! You must pose as a mock hero; you—a low trickster, a player upon women's sympathies! Oh, I was an easy victim, I know! Believe me, sir, I shall not forgive myself the folly of speaking to you so long as I live!"

He had a temper quite equal to her own. She saw it flare in the depths of his dark-blue eyes. But he also had a self-control that mastered it at his will.

"It is a happy life which holds no greater regret than that, *mademoiselle*," he returned quite calmly, even with a faint mockery.

Anne clenched her fingers upon the handle of the door.

"We will drop the pretense of your being French, please," she requested. "Since you comprehend perfectly well that I cannot have you arrested without making myself ridiculous, there is no need of continuing your farce. And I am aware, also, of your false statement that you were a sculptor. The statuette which you had the impertinence to send me as a sample of your own work I know now was a cheap copy of a standard figure for sale in all the shops, in various forms. That bit was a trifle clumsier than the rest of your play, was it not?"

"Perhaps," he conceded. "Certainly I invited a discovery in sending you the model."

His composure exasperated her to a degree of passion strange to herself and alien to her nature. The quiet deference of his pose, the unchanging steadiness of his gaze past her at the flowing traffic—for he would not meet her eyes—goaded her beyond herself in search of means to wound him.

"But for my carelessness in giving you my card-case with my purse, I should have been spared that piece of insolence, at least," she said cuttingly. "And, also, the risk of having you trade upon your knowledge of my name."

His eyes flashed to meet hers, then. His whole face fired a white anger that dwarfed her wrath to a weak and childish petulance. He made a swift step forward and laid his hand over hers where it gripped the car-door.

"Miss Van Huyden!" he exclaimed sternly. "That is enough!"

Trembling with fury at his arrogant manner, at his shameless presumption in touching her, Anne lifted her left hand and struck him across the face with the glove she held. Then, dropping the glove in a veritable panic of dismay and mortification, she flung herself across the car and

blindly started it forward, heedless of the man at the open door.

He drew back in time to avoid being run over, and swung the door shut with a crash. Shivering and panting, her whole slim body burning in successive waves of heat, her thick lashes wet with tears of shame, Anne drove her car toward home without the slightest after-knowledge of how she managed to avoid the varied pitfalls of city travel.

He, the cheat, had dared rebuke *her;* had laid polluting hands upon her! Worst and most bitter, he had dragged her from her lofty aloofness by goading her to an unworthy action—the action of a fishwife, a common woman. She had struck him; she, Anne Van Huyden! She stood on his level, now; a vulgar, lawless creature.

Arrived at the house, Anne fled to her room like a disgraced child. She dreaded meeting her mother, with the signs of the conflict all too visible. She was deeply thankful for the fact that her father would not be home for some hours. Parents are uncomfortably clairvoyant at times. If any one knew this story, any of those she loved and respected and met every day, it seemed to Anne she must do like her Great-Aunt Adora, and die.

Adora had been among the last of a frailer generation. Athletic, healthy girls of the present day do not die with such graceful ease. Anne knew that she certainly would continue to live. She did not want to die, for that matter; although she never had supposed it was possible to suffer as frightful a depression as gripped her for its prey when the heat of her rage and confusion began to cool down to embers.

She had gone out after vengeance, and come in humbled. She was right, but he was victorious. Oh, why could he not have been honest, not have had that poor, common virtue? Was it true that only wicked men possess that strange allure, that power to shake the hearts of women?

It must be true, for no man that she had met legitimately ever had shaken her as had this trickster from the streets. Not that he allured her now! No, she detested him.

Anne shut herself in seclusion with a very genuine headache.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOILED GLOVE.

IT was late in the same day when her maid brought to Miss Van Huyden a rather bulky envelope.

"The postman just now left it, miss," the woman volunteered, eying apologetically the swollen missive.

Anne took it from the proffered tray with languid interest. The cheap, yellowish envelope did not resemble her usual mail; it did not even look like an advertisement or a plea for charity. It was soft to the touch, and seemed to contain some fabric. She did not wonder that it had provoked Sophy's scorn, or that she lingered curiously near her mistress to glimpse the contents.

The yellow paper yielded readily under the paper-knife. Out of the torn envelope tumbled a heap that resolved itself into a soiled white glove.

Anne fell back on her couch.

"You may lay out my things, Sophy," she directed levelly. "I shall go down to dinner. My head is better. But first you may bring my tea, please."

She did not want tea, and she did not want dinner. She was sick with anger beyond the possibility of appetite. For the insolent trickster had the last word, after all. He had sent back to her the glove she had flung in his face! Even out of her sight and hearing, he had managed to make the last taunt his. This was his retort to her haughtiness and contempt—this reminder of how she had degraded her own dignity.

He might have spared her this, she thought savagely; he had had her purse. But why expect generosity from a swindler?

She had sent Sophy after the tea in order to dispose of the hateful glove un-

observed by inquisitive eyes. There was no disowning it as not her own, for Anne's gloves were made to order for her and bore her monogram inside the wrist. Rising from her couch, she lifted the ball of crumpled white kid from her lap and walked toward the open fireplace.

How stiff it was, that glove! And how odd that falling on a winter street should soil it so entirely! A strong, acrid odor rose from it, like smoke or creosote, instead of the delicate sweetness of her sachet that formerly made it fragrant. It must have fallen in the gutter, she decided, shaking it impatiently. She wished to lay it upon the fire extended to its length, that it might blaze quickly and be consumed, instead of charring in a tight ball so slowly that Sophy would return in time to see the proceeding.

The glove refused to shake from its folds. When she pulled it, the fine kid parted reluctantly, seeming dried together. Then the girl perceived that it must have been saturated with some reddish-brown fluid, long since dry.

How could a glove so dripping wet at eleven in the morning be dry to the crackling point at five in the afternoon? More, it must have been dry when mailed in that thin envelope! Perhaps in an oven—But why? Why the haste? Why not have waited until morning?

Why send it to her at all?

Anne stood quite still before the hearth, staring at the dirty glove while her moments of privacy slipped past. The mystery intrigued her strangely. That man was not one to do things aimlessly, she felt assured. Suddenly she cried out sharply at a discovery.

This glove was for the right hand; the one she had struck her coward with, that morning, had been the left-hand glove!

She had given a right-hand glove to the vicomte-in-the-snow, with her violet purse.

Sophy came into the room with the tea-tray, by and by, and began to arrange all with nice precision. Her side-glances at her young mistress were discreetly taken. She was an Englishwoman, was Sophy; and no longer a girl. She had had experience.

"Sophy," said Miss Van Huyden in an odd tone. "Sophy, what should you say had stained this glove?"

The maid crossed to the hearth where Anne stood in the ruddy firelight, and took the article offered for her inspection. Soberly decorous, she held it up and examined it exhaustively.

"If you please, miss, I should say it was blood," Sophy rendered her verdict. "And an uncommon lot of it, too, miss. But it do smell," she sniffed, "like smoke. Or disinfectants, maybe!"

She stole another furtively interested glance at the girl. She detected romance in this, and romance with a satisfying thrill of tragedy. Sophy was no more indifferent to the great war and the warriors than were the other women of the world. She had her private visions. And surely Miss Anne was of an unusual pallor!

Anne took the glove from the maid; but she did not consign it to the convenient fire. Instead, she studied it once more, folding the little fingers back from the shrunken palm and holding it up to the light. It was not marred in any other way than by immersion in that once-red fluid. Evidently it had not done the traditional work of bibles and souvenirs, and stopped a bullet or a sword-point.

The girl smiled with more than a touch of self-derision. Was she so soon forgetting that the man never had left New York? He had not even denied her accusation. Catching Sophy's eye, she walked to the tea-table and sat down; throwing the glove negligently across her knees and commencing to cream and sugar her tea.

If he were quite the hardened swindler she had supposed him, would he not have been glad enough to escape with a lecture and a blow from a lady's glove, in place of arrest for his trick? And, so escaped, would he not have let his defrauded benefactress severely alone thereafter? Yet

he had sent her the glove; and certainly meant her to understand something by the action.

If not a taunt, what was it?

It might be a defense. Or an excuse? Or, perhaps, a plea from a man misjudged? A little color began to flow into Anne's face. Perhaps she had not been a miserable fool and dupe, but merely unjust.

It was much easier, she reflected, to repair an injustice than one's own pride.

"Which is a triumph of selfishness over conscience!" she murmured, with a grimace at herself.

"You spoke, miss?"

"Merely soliloquized, Sophy. I dropped a little statue there by the hearth, some time ago. The bits flew about, and I remember the head rolled under one of the andirons. Do you suppose that you could find any of those pieces now?"

"They will have been cleaned up, miss, long ago," demurred Sophy, scandalized at the implied untidiness.

But she got awkwardly to hands and knees to investigate, her large bones projecting through her black silk gown in the most unanticipated places as she scrambled about. The supple Anne regarded her pityingly. Nature was unjust, too, she comforted her uneasy conscience.

The glove and the conscience were joining forces, however, and refused to be silenced. Anne had so mercilessly condemned her man, because it was hardly possible to reach the front in Europe, performed distinguished services, and be back in New York on a furlough within a period of six weeks. But now she asked herself if there could not have been some honorable cause for his failure to go abroad.

Was the city so free from accidents and mischance that he could not have been injured in some minor way which had delayed his departure? He might have been struck by a taxicab, for instance; or have slipped on the icy streets and broken a limb. Any such event would account for the stained glove.

Yet why not have told the truth of the affair to her, if an explanation existed? Why bear attack to-day? That did not seem like the man to whom she had told the story of Adora, and who had so frankly told her his need. To allow her to wrong him so far, and then send her the hard reproach of the blood-soaked glove—that was not the character she had seemed to divine in the whimsical unexpectedness of the vicomte-in-the-snow!

It was true that she had given him small opportunity to speak in their tempestuous interview that morning; she acknowledged so much to herself. Still he could have compelled her to listen if he had chosen. He certainly had compelled her to stop when she had carried insult beyond his patience.

"There is nothing there, Miss Van Huyden," Sophy announced, heaving herself erect with a bovine lack of grace. Her eye was triumphant. "We sweep every day."

"Thank you," nodded Anne.

She was disappointed. She had recalled the man's dry remark that he had invited a discovery by giving her the statuette. Anne could remember no mark upon the Gamester, although she had held it in her hands many times, but she would have liked to reexamine any remaining fragments of the outraged figurine.

"What the children of Nurnberg take pleasure in making,
The children of England take pleasure in breaking."

She quoted the couplet aloud, ruefully setting down her teacup and rising.

"Never mind, Sophy," she added, laughing at the inquiring face turned to her. "That was only a nursery jingle. And this was an American child, anyhow!"

Anne descended to dinner, later, in a much better humor with herself and the world than she would have supposed possible before the arrival of the glove. She would not in the least mind apologizing to her vicomte, if it should develop that

he had been wronged by her hastiness. All might be well. There was still time for him to go to his country and do service.

It appeared that there were guests for dinner; a certain well-known artist and his wife who were old and fast friends of the Van Huydens. At least twice a month the four elders spent an evening together, sometimes joined by their young people, sometimes left to themselves; and accepting either event with equal satisfaction.

Anne had not known, or had forgotten that they were expected this evening. But at sight of the artist a sudden idea flashed upon her.

She would do nothing hurriedly. She waited until half-way through the dinner, when a lull occurred in the general conversation, to address her question to the guest at her side.

"Have you noticed a clever figure that is all around the shops?" she asked, with her cool, graceful casualness. "The figure of a boy playing marbles? It really is quite good, so far as a mere amateur may judge. I wonder if it originated in your beloved Greenwich Village?"

The artist turned to her smilingly. He had painted Anne's portrait when she was a baby thing of four years, with dimpled pink knees showing under her lace frock and a Maltese terrier clasped in her chubby arms. She had exacted the presence of the toy dog in her picture as the price of posing at all. He felt a paternal pride in the beauty of the young woman he now regarded.

"The judgment is a credit to my training of your taste," he approved of her. "Yes, the Gamester is good; more than good. And it was created in New York, if not exactly in my village. It was the work of an artist who was hard up; as most young artists are at some time. I was, often! He sold the original to Siebel—of the chain of stores, you know—for less than a hundred dollars. Siebel was taken with it, and has had it copied in a dozen ways. I have seen Gamester paperweights, book-rocks, ash-trays, and door-porters. It has proved popular, I understand, and must have made money for Siebel."

"But the sculptor?"

He shrugged.

"He had his hundred dollars."

Anne waited a moment before putting her next question; she wished to appear altogether nonchalant.

"Who was he?"

"His name was Debray, Marc Debray. He was French, with an American mother. I met him once at an exhibition. When the war first broke out he went back to France. I suppose those clever fingers of his are tugging a trigger now, if the poor fellow is still alive."

"When—the war—*first* broke out?" she stammered.

"Yes. A year and a half ago. I never read the newspapers any more, or I might have seen something of him. But I dislike horrors I cannot help!"

Anne murmured something and bent her shining little head over her plate. Again she was struck out of all reckoning. For how could the vicomte-in-the-snow be Marc Debray, since one was in France and the other in America? Yet, unless he was Marc Debray, why had he sent her the copy of the Gamester? Could he be doubly an impostor, who had stolen another and absent man's identity—and for what object?

Anne sighed in weary exasperation, and startled her father, who sat at her other side at the round table.

Decidedly, the problem of the snow-shoveling man was becoming an obsession. She must either solve or forget it; and quickly!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF MARC DEBRAY.

THE next day passed quietly, not to say dully. Another day began in an equally commonplace manner. Anne began to realize that the adventure with the trickster threatened to drift into

the past, which devours so many things and renders no account of them. Evidently Mr. Debray—if the man were he—intended to make no further move toward Miss Van Huyden. Perhaps he did not care what opinion of him that young lady held.

He did, though! Had he not sent her the glove, that maddening partial explanation? And what a deadly temper he had gone into when she hinted that he meditated future blackmail!

Anne never had gone without anything she really wanted. Out of frustration now sprang resolution. On the morning of the third day she followed her father into the library after breakfast.

"Dear, how does one find out about people?" she questioned. "I mean, how would one trace a person who had disappeared, and of whom one wished news?"

"What kind of a person?"

"A man. He went to the war in France, I think. An artist."

Mr. Van Huyden gazed silently at his daughter, across the library table. Anne was pushing books about rather nervously, her eyes downcast.

"What is his name?" he inquired.

"I—believe, it is Debray; Mr. Marc Debray."

"You are not certain?"

"I am—almost. That is, yes. I want to know what became of Marc Debray anyhow."

"An artist? Did he perhaps send you that little statuette which you showed to us, one evening?"

"Yes," she murmured, committing herself desperately.

Mr. Van Huyden sighed.

"You say he joined the French army. Well, it is just possible that I may be able to find out for you, if he is a prominent person."

"He isn't," said Anne naively. "He was just a young sculptor, quite poor. And I am not sure that he ever went to France at all. If he did, he isn't!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Please, never mind," said Anne.

No doubt Mr. Van Huyden had his thoughts, but he did not obtrude them. Instead he went down-town.

At one o'clock he telephoned to the house to find out if his daughter were lunching at home. A servant replied that she was. Satisfied on that point, Mr. Van Huyden brought home a guest to luncheon.

What he had not been informed was that Anne entertained this day some twenty of her friends, who composed a sewing club for the purpose of providing tobacco for the Belgian soldiers. Into that gay and fluffy assemblage he came unwarned, bringing his captive; who was a gray-haired, military gentleman, distinctly foreign in appearance and accent.

They were welcomed effusively. Anne, her pulses quickened by her divination of why her father had brought home this guest, saw the sober general separated from her by the enthusiasm of the club members. The girls clustered like bees around the foreigner, who was presented to them as a diplomat of some distinction, and on the retired list of the French army.

But, as a guest of honor, he was given the place at his hostess's right. Anne watched for her opportunity. During a moment when Mr. Van Huyden held the merry party engaged in an eager debate with himself, she lifted her eyes to find the general regarding her with a kindly understanding. Impulsively she leaned toward him.

"Were you going to tell me something?" she wondered. "Something about a—an acquaintance of mine, who has disappeared?"

He refused the evasion.

"About Captain Debray, *mademoiselle?*"

She was unreasonably startled by the title. Her man had told her he was an officer, but she had fallen into the habit of discounting all he said. Anne laid a firm hold upon her composure before answering.

"Please," she requested.

The old man looked down at his sherbet-glass, his lined face serious.

"A charming boy. But unlucky! I first met him in Belgium, a year ago. He was attached to the staff of one of my friends then; where he was a great favorite for his unquenchable good spirits. He did splendid work in the field. All our officers and men have done splendid work. A shell got him, at last, when he was bringing in one of his men from a poisoned-gas zone where to stay was to die."

"He was killed?"

"No, no! Neither he nor the wounded man he brought in with him. As soon as he was out of the hospital, he tried to return to his regiment. It was no use. The surgeons pronounced him unfit for active service for at least five or six months. His wound had left him lame, and although they promised him that would wear off, he was of no use until it did. So he returned to the United States to wait. He said he could support himself in this country, and not burden overburdened France to feed and shelter him. Was he not a painter?"

"A sculptor," Anne corrected. The laughter and gaiety around them covered the betraying unsteadiness of her voice.

"Ah? Now I recall that he gathered a handful of clay from the breastworks before a trench one day while I was there, and in a moment fashioned a *danseuse*, a ballet-girl, at which his men laughed all day until the rain melted it down. *Eh bien*, two months ago he started for Holland, on his way back to his regiment. He was cured."

"Yes?"

The general shrugged.

"Have I not said that he was unlucky? He took the unfortunate liner Gilda from Boston. Surely you read, *mademoiselle*, how that boat was either torpedoed or struck a mine? And now that I think, it is strange you did not see the name of Captain Debray in the accounts."

"I—yes," she stammered. She could not well tell him at that time the name of Captain Debray meant nothing to her. But now she remembered; and knew why Marc Debray's name had so oddly startled her, just now, when the general gave it the due prefix of captain.

"He was one of the heroes of the tragedy. He fought the fire—you recall that the Gilda kept afloat, but caught fire? Debray led a brigade at that work in the hold until the smoke and fumes overcame him. They controlled the flames until the wireless brought aid. The Gilda's people were transferred to a sister liner, homeward bound; and with them Debray, suffering from the effects of the fumes and a cut on the shoulder received somehow in the confusion.

"He must have been back in Boston or New York within a week after he sailed for Europe. But it is quite possible that he has again sailed, since his recovery. He was all spirit! If he has not gone, it is because he has not been able."

"Yes," agreed Anne softly. "I am quite sure of that also. You see I am honored by knowing him, too."

"Then I withdraw my statement that he is unlucky," bowed the gentleman.

The luncheon finished somehow. Indeed, it finished triumphantly. The hostess turned back to her guests, after that conversation, in a mood of excited light-heartedness that carried all with her. She laughed, she sparkled, her cheeks were rose-color and her eyes reminiscent of the deepest violet ray in a rainbow. It would have seemed that the misfortunes of Marc Debray affected her not at all.

Mr. Van Huyden, who had heard the story from the general during the morning, regarded his daughter with anxious unease. He suspected her to be an actress in a play of merriment far from her heart.

But Anne's high spirits were genuine. It was so shining a victory to know that the vicomte-in-the-snow *did* justify the

strange impulse which had carried her to his aid at her first sight of him. And she knew he was alive and in the city; not yet abroad or in a hospital. She could apologize to him and make all right. Men readily forgive to a woman an insult for which they would slay one another with good will.

He was not vindictive, she felt assured. The difficulty of finding him she dismissed from her mind as a trifle. Her father would manage that for her; as he had produced the general to satisfy her need for knowledge.

Between them they would help Captain Debray to what he most desired; even if it were to go and be hurt all over again with his regiment!

Somehow, she no longer wished him to go to the front, now that his courage had been proved to her. She even asked herself if he had not done enough, and should not now think of preserving his genius for a world more hungry for beauty than war?

When the last guest finally had departed, Mr. Van Huyden remained in the drawing-room until his daughter came back to him alone. He looked rather queerly at her as she hesitated between the curtains of the door in an altogether new mood of embarrassment.

"Was the general's budget of information satisfactory?" he offered her an opening. "Of course you knew why I brought him to you?"

Anne slowly lifted her eyes to his, then went to him in a little rush; drawing him down into a chair and herself settling on the rug beside him in a drift of peach-colored chiffon and silk. Her bright head against his arm, she poured out the whole story of her adventures with Marc Debray.

"But do not tell mama," she prefaced the tale. "Because she would think it must be a love story. And it isn't, it isn't at all! It is—it is a sort of experiment. An occult experiment in sympathy! She is a dear sentimentalist, and we are not. Are we?"

"No," averred Peter Van Huyden. He did not laugh as he looked down at the nestling head. Men who are jealous do not laugh easily.

Anne omitted nothing from her account; she was conscientious about that. When the long narrative was ended, late afternoon was commencing to gray the room. The two sat in silence for a while, after her voice fell mute, and drew close in an understanding too delicate for words.

"You want me to find him for you," Mr. Van Huyden said at last; less as a question than as an interpretation.

"I have to apologize to him," she suggested meekly. "One cannot slap a hero and not even apologize, can one? I could never be comfortable in my mind. And—you are so powerful, dear darling! And he is so very struggling an artist! You could make people pay for his statues instead of stealing them. Yes, I insist it was stealing to take them for so little and make so much from them afterward! Then I should like you to know him and mama."

"Oh, bring him home, by all means!" said Mr. Van Huyden, with a peculiar emphasis. "I should rather have him here than—"

He did not complete his sentence. Instead he added, a moment later:

"I looked him up a bit this morning. He is of a good family on both sides. To-morrow I will try to find him for you; and have a talk with him myself. If I like him—"

"You will," predicted Anne; and kissed him.

She was more than content. Yet to-morrow is a very long time when one is young.

Anne was running up the stairs when an idea came to her out of the air, like a bird alighting on her hand. The artist who had painted her portrait when she was a little girl, and who had told her the history of the Gamester—might he not know where the young sculptor lived?

She finished the ascent more slowly, reviewing the situation. She would like to see the vicomte-in-the-snow by herself, at this next meeting of theirs on which must turn their future friendship or indifference. A witness, however dear and trusted, would mar all the sympathy of thought that should make easy her peace-making. And, suppose Captain Debray should reject peace; be icily courteous and impossible? How could she bear any one to witness her in such a position? She could not!

In her own room, she shut the door and hurried to the telephone.

The distinguished artist chanced to be at home. And he could give a qualified answer to her inquiry; he knew where Mr. Debray had lived eighteen months before. Did Anne care for that address?

Anne did; and obtained it.

She hung up the receiver, and rested her chin in her palm. A glance at her clock established that the hour was exactly five. Three hours remained before dinner, and at least one hour would be daylight. What if she went to him now at once?

Not to his rooms, of course; she was not prepared for that defiance of convention. But to drive to his door and send in a servant to summon him out to her—that might not be too much, with a man to whom she had already yielded so much of her dignity. She rose with a mien of resolution, and rang.

"Give me the long moleskin coat, Sophy, and the hat that goes with it," she directed. "I am going out, and I have no time to change my frock. But first order the closed car for me."

She would have liked to take Sophy with her. But that was hardly possible, if Marc Debray was to enter the limousine in order that they might converse in freedom with impeccable conventionality. Sophy would accord with that conversation about as gracefully as a clothespin would secure a corsage-bouquet. No; Anne would show the trickster that she trusted him; if a little late in doing so!

Humming a fragment of song, the girl sped down the stairs and out to the motor-car. She gave the directions to the man with a sense of deep excitement. She permitted no thought of failure to annoy her. If Captain Debray had moved, no doubt the people in the building would know his present address. His mail must be forwarded somewhere.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE.

IT was a longer drive than she had expected. The great up-town movement of the city's homing hour flowed against their progress down-town, delaying and hampering advance. At last the car turned east, and proceeded more easily thereafter.

It was still daylight when the car swept a curve around in a cobble-paved street, and came to a halt by the curb. Anne Van Huyden looked out, into a street as unfamiliar to her as any in a foreign city.

It was not exactly a dirty street; it was a dreary, hopeless, sodden street whose considerable width only added to its effect of desolation. It was a street that looked dead and abandoned. No children swarmed there; it had the air of never expecting to swarm with anything again. The blocks of dingy brick houses added sullenness to their architectural hideousness.

In a word, it was a street the city had overlooked in its growth; a stagnant pool in the fold of a mighty river.

The footman was holding open the car-door. Anne looked from the sleek servant to the gaunt house beyond with a contraction of the heart. Suddenly she remembered the biscuit-box in which the statuette had been sent to her. It had cried out to her as with a tongue, even then, before she knew the sender's story.

If Marc Debray were here, could she send in her supercilious man to stare at

the honorable poverty of the gentleman and soldier? Would the act be decent even? What were her mean, suspicious conventions, beside his pride and need?

She motioned the footman aside, and descended. Her white-shod feet looked singularly fresh and alien upon the dingy steps to the house; as, indeed, her exquisitely cared-for beauty showed vividly foreign to the frowsy place of make-shifts. But she was not thinking of her appearance at all as she rang the door-bell. For the first time she was really comprehending the enormity of her offense to Marc Debray, when she added her insults to all he had had to endure.

She brought rescue; but with a qualm of new humility she began to wonder if he would accept it at her hands.

An enormously fat woman with dusty hair opened the door. The arrival of the motor-car had not passed unnoticed. The woman stared from it to the young woman in the fine fur coat, whose absurd little fur and velvet hat was so inimitably placed on her smooth, gleaming hair; appraising all while she listened to Anne's inquiry.

Mr. Debray? Oh, yes—with a lessening of respect—he had the attic here. When he first came he had one of the good rooms. When he went away, he had got leave to store his things in the attic while he was gone. But when he came back, he had paid a little more to live there himself, instead of taking his old room. Was miss a relation of his—with peering inquisitiveness?

Anne lied and said she was, and wished to see him.

She could go right up then was the reply, for he was there now; had just come in, in fact. The woman excused herself for not escorting the visitor, averring she found it hard to climb the stairs since she grew fleshy.

Every fiber aching in sympathy for Marc Debray, who had to live amid all this repulsiveness, Anne went up the twisted stairs covered with holey carpet, where broken brass stair-rods projected like vindictive fingers striving to catch and trip a passing foot. The last flight of steps to the attic were bare boards sadly grimed and tapestried with ancient webs.

Outside the rough door at the top, Anne stood hesitating in timid indecision. What if he were not prepared for a feminine visitor? What if he resented her coming? Suppose she went home without seeing him, and wrote, instead, asking him to call upon her? Why, why had she not thought of a letter to him, before coming on this mad escapade? Had this man bewitched her, that she never could conduct herself toward him as she did toward other people?

It had not occurred to her that even her light footfall echoed on the bare stairs. While she poised on the verge of retreat, a voice summoned her from the other side of the door.

It was a familiar voice, and neither mournful nor angry, but pleasant as a clear day of sunshine. And its unexpectedness of speech was quite as unlooked-for as the girl could have anticipated.

"Come in, Sacharissa!" it called. "Bring the bone, and don't slam the door."

Anne Van Huyden meekly obeyed.

The attic was well lighted for an attic. It contained the miscellaneous assortment of discarded things usual to garrets and storerooms, except for a cleared space under the skylight, where a sort of apartment was arranged. There Marc Debray was standing with his back to the door, engaged in feeding biscuit to a peculiarly ugly dog with only three legs; a dog of large size which sat upon a broken marble-topped center-table and lolled out its tongue in a dissolute manner extremely novel.

"Set it on the floor," he requested, without turning. "All my gratitude goes with that dime on the corner of the blue box, queen among Sacharissas of the past and future."

"It isn't Sacharissa," said Anne Van Huyden, as coolly as she could manage.

The man swung about, and stood arrested, dumb. Anne stood against the closed door, flushed and palpitant, a veritable brightness in a shady place.

She had expected him to be astonished, but his absolute paralysis steadied and stimulated her. Since it seemed he could not speak, she found her voice again.

"I have come to apologize to you," she avowed the truth without evasion. "You see, I know everything now. And if to be ashamed is to make amends, then I have made my best payment already; and will continue it all my life, Captain Debray. Will you forgive me?"

"I wish you had not come," he answered, his voice low and constrained. "There was no need. You were very kind to me. The—misunderstanding, at the last, was most natural. I cannot allow you to speak of apology to me. Please do not permit the matter to trouble you."

"Are you not glad that I know the truth?"

"Yes. Of course!"

Puzzled, with a chilled sense of rebuff, she gazed at him. Of all the ways he might meet her, she had least foreseen this cold and painful stiffness. Was his resentment so very deep as to lie beyond her touch? Or was he angry that she should see him in his povery? That shame was not like the vicomte-in-the-snow, with his brave candor. He stood, with lowered gaze fixed upon the dog-biscuit in his hand, not looking at the girl at all. And now Anne saw that which she had not seen on the day she struck him with her glove: how much thinner he was, and that there were fine vertical lines between his straight brows. The sight struck sharply across her heart, avenging him.

"You cannot pardon me for my distrust of you," she said, humbled and uncertain. "Yet, are not you perhaps a little to blame, also? Might you not have written, or come to see me, when you returned to New York after the sinking of the Gilda? Had I not earned that much, in justice?"

"You do not understand; it was impossible for me," he replied, in the same repressed manner. "And I have blamed you for nothing, ever."

She would not go, although his attitude left her scant excuse for remaining. Her eyelids burned like those of a punished little girl who desires to cry, yet will not. She still stood with her back against the rough plank door; a quaint, slim figure in her rich dress.

"You have a dog," she murmured, because there seemed nothing else to say, yet she must speak or go.

The speech relieved Debray's embarrassment. He turned to caress the ugly, massive head.

"Pitou is a Red Cross dog, Miss Van Huyden. He was to have been shot when he lost his leg, but I begged him off. I brought him home with me on my first return. I had to put him in a kennel when I started back, after I met you. He fared better there, but he is overjoyed to be here again, he tells me."

She came over and stroked the animal, which suffered her to do so, but drew away to force its head against the man's shoulder with an eloquent movement of devotion.

"I see he does," she agreed.

"You wonder how I paid his board at the kennels?" he read her thought with disconcerting accuracy. "The owner of the place took my last bit of work in exchange for Pitou's privileges."

"Your last work?" A finality in his accent moved her to the question.

"Have you never thought there must have been a reason why I shoveled snow in the streets?" he asked bruskly, as if the admission was wrenched from him. "When I came back from France the first time, to recover from my lameness, I expected to earn my living as I had before. I was not famous, I had not grown rich, but I had always earned enough. I had planned some new work from poses

I had seen at the front; they would have sold! But—"

She looked up at him mutely, her eyes darkened to blackish-purple in her horror of the pain that roughened his voice. Marc Debray shrugged with attempted lightness, and held out his hands, palm upward. There were scars upon them.

"The shell that lamed me had injured these. I thought little of it then; the hurts healed quickly, and I could use my hands well enough. But when I came to do my modeling, I found it was not to be. My fingers were too stiff, too clumsy; the sense of touch was no longer fine enough. So, I—shoveled."

"And I— Oh, I do not wonder that you cannot forgive me! But, please try. I beg of you to try. Remember that I first spoke to you, upon the street. Would I have done that if I had not really trusted you? And—why did you not tell me this long ago, or when I met you near the park the other day? You have not answered that. Was it just to let me be unjust?"

His self-restraint trembled like a fabric overstrained. He caught her hand as it rested on the dog's head, and looked down into her face.

"Just?" he echoed. "Just? I was fighting to be generous."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"I will tell you, because it is too late to be silent, now. I mean all I meant that first day, when I told you that you did not understand Adora Hamilton. I mean that you were wrong, and love can be born, or reborn, in the meeting of strangers' eyes.

"The impulse that compelled you to break all rules and take me from the street into the car beside you, was that ancient cry of one to another, although no louder than a whisper in your ear. I knew, then, that I could awaken you from your ignorance. I knew, then, that you must think of me thereafter as I have thought of you, waking and sleeping, in health and in sickness, with rapture and torture, every hour since, and will think of you when I die and at God's pleasure thereafter also.

"I knew that truth before I left your limousine, before you had finished the story of Adora Hamilton, before I had twice met your eyes. Then I dreamed of returning after the war was ended and awakening you to that knowledge which was already mine, and taking you for my wife. And when I returned as I did, it was because I feared that unwillingly I might awake you to your sorrow, that I avoided you; and let you think ill of me.

"Do you think that cost me nothing? But I hoped to leave you asleep!"

She was shivering, her gaze steadfast upon the blue fire and grief of his eyes.

"Why," she faltered, "why, if you wanted me never to know, did you send me the stained glove?"

He turned away abruptly and flung himself into a rickety chair beside the table, putting his hand across his eyes. The dog hobbled across the table and licked his fingers, unnoticed.

"Because I failed there, too," he said bitterly. "Because after all, I could not bear that you should think me quite so low. After I came home I had a bad hour—I mailed it. I believed it would do no harm; you never would see me again and would come to forget our meeting, in time. I fancied the glove might tell you that I had played some small part decently, at least. Oh, after it was sent I repented sharply enough! I ask your pardon."

Anne took a step toward him. She felt no anger at his assumption that she could or did love him; she knew he was right. But his attitude still troubled and perplexed her; it was as if he held her away from him and forbade the happiness coloring her life like the approach of a splendid dawn. She felt both dazed and dazzled.

"My pardon?" she marveled. "But you would have wronged me by such silence only! Why should you not have come to me—for me? You, who are honored by all who know you for your cour-

age and genius and beautiful kindness? You did not think that I should care less because you could not model? It is you who suffer from that, not I; except for your loss. I—I suppose it was because I have wealth and you have not. But—"

He started up, facing her. And at his straight, hot glance her heart was overturned like a vessel of clear water.

"Your *money?*" he repeated, with astonished scorn. "No, and no a hundred times! I speak to you of the pulse of life, and you ask me of the accident of wealth? I tell you I love you; you would have married, not hired me. There is no place in the world that I could have given you, we being what we are. But, my hands would have healed, in time. I should have brought you fame, some day; the Master Rodin told me so, in Paris."

"But, then, *why?*" she groped. "Why not? I—I see you are right in all. Why do you speak as if it could not be for us as you say?"

He did not touch her as she leaned toward him, the darkness of furs parting over the peach-colored chiffon that fell back from her round white throat, her face uplifted and ardent.

"Must you hear that, also?" he asked quietly. "Listen, then, my poor child. The shell was not all the mischief, that time; in France, you know. There was poisoned gas— I recovered. But the smoke and fumes in the Gilda's hold, and perhaps the drenching we got in midwinter, found the weak spot left by the poison. I did not write to you, I would not see you—not for any of the reasons you have imagined—but because I have only a few months to live."

Amid all the possible answers to her perplexity, Anne never had conceived the dimmest thought of the great answer to all human problems. Death? Frozen, she stared at Marc Debray; at the virile youth of his face, the pitying warmth of his eyes, stern only to himself, at the upright soldier's poise of his strong body.

He was to die? Back across her heart rolled one by one the evidences of a passion that would have spared her even itself, and spent its force, not in selfish devastation, but in tenderness for her. And she had called herself generous, who handed him her purse!

Suddenly she was in his arms, pressing herself against his breast, gripping his arms with her small, fierce hands.

"No! No! No!" she cried, her voice ringing through the attic. "I love you, Marc Debray. You shall not die! I will not let you die. Do you hear me? You *shall not*. We will go West; we will try everything. There are specialists! You are young and strong; people do not die so unless of neglect. My father understands, he will send us away from this place which kills you. You will get well, when you are not cold or lonely or starving. You must. Did they not say you might, so?"

"Anne, Anne!"

"They did. I see it in your eyes. And you told them you were too poor, and hid it from me! Oh, that dear glove! Marc, you are my husband, and I shall be your wife. Yes, even if we are to lose our battle. Adora had that, and I will have no less. But we shall not lose. It is life before us, warm life."

Even the dusk was almost gone when they drew apart; yet clasping hands as if they dared not quite break contact lest they lose one another.

"Would you have left me, with no word?" she reproached.

"I meant to send you Pitou, afterward," he confessed. "I liked to think he would be near you—and I knew you would keep my three-legged veteran for his own record of honor. Anne, dear Anne, if I light the lamp, will you vanish and I awake?"

"We will light it together," she promised him. "But not here, vicomte-in-the-snow! Never here, again! My father told me to bring you home. Yes, you are coming home with me; and we will take Pitou with us in the car. Hush! Your rule is over and mine begins. I

shall not trust you with yourself, Marc; only with myself forever and ever. We are going home. And you are going to get well."

"I believe I am," said Marc Debray wonderingly.

When they opened the attic door, they discovered the figure of a small human creature huddled on the top step of the stair. Anne leaned down in the semi-darkness to distinguish the features of a frowsy, ugly little girl.

"Who—" she began.

"This," explained Debray, "is Sacharissa, asleep. Probably she awaited the departure of my exalted guest. And I have not paid her for Pitou's bone, which I perceive to be in her lap."

Anne impulsively drew a sapphire ring from her finger and laid it beside Pitou's dinner.

"Marc," she whispered soberly, "you would not fear my ever doubting you in anything again if you could know how I longed to ask you who Sacharissa was—and did not!"

The three who were going home went down-stairs together; Pitou much more nimbly than the pair who loitered after him.

(The end.)

"NO STROPPING—"

BY W. E. NESOM

SHE reared a brood of twelve, nor lost
A one, and so they praise her—
Her children do—by calling her
"A perfect safety-raiser."

In view of how, for many years
She had to stint and slave,
They say she did the business by
The closest kind of shave.

Her discipline at most, they claim,
Comprised a random slap,
And no one ever heard of her
Resorting to the strap.

That, while a little sharp at times,
No blood she ever drew—
She kept a guard upon herself,
And kept her temper, too.

They say of her, with proper pride,
That she was never bested,
Although at